

*Terræ Incognitæ as Ego Incognita: Mapping Thomas De Quincey's Confessions of an English
Opium-Eater*

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Abstract

Mapping literature has become a common metaphor in recent years, often to represent an organisational principle or to suggest the importance of geography in the critical work. This paper examines the place of geography in literature and demonstrates that maps can add to our knowledge of literature. I use Richard Horwood's 1792–9 *Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster* to visualise the movements of Thomas De Quincey in his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* by plotting his movements within London and contrasting them to his earlier travels in Wales. I demonstrate that De Quincey's writing process creates an imaginative London, *London imaginis*, that has the real London, *London res*, as a source. The *London imaginis* is shaped by De Quincey's language and becomes an infernal prison where his "Dark Interpreter" associates with a community of pariahs, as Joetta Harty refers to it. This is in stark contrast to the paradisal, verdurous, Wales chapters where De Quincey is sociable and free. This spatial reading examines the difference between De Quincey's identity in Wales and in London by exploring the language he uses and the spatial constructions in both London and Wales that become apparent when plotted on a map. This mapping demonstrates how De Quincey artificially constructs both his *London imaginis* and his London identity, his *ego imaginis*, to purposefully align himself among the lower classes.

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Franco Moretti poses a question in his book *Maps, Graphs, Trees* that has only recently been asked by any literary critic: “do maps *add* anything to our knowledge of literature?” (35). A few other scholars have started to investigate the potential of maps, such as Allison Stenton¹ who asks “what is the place of geography in literature, or literature in geography?” (62), noting that geography in literary texts is “not just historical fact but also an imaginative fiction” (62). The critical study of the “imaginative fiction” of the geography of texts by using visualisation (i.e. a map) is fairly recent; Martyn Jessop, a noted Digital Humanist, suggests that

visualization is a scholarly activity rich in opportunities to create knowledge. The methodology itself and the theoretical issues surrounding it are still young and lack the long history of debate that has shaped other scholarly activities. It is therefore essential that such a debate is begun and sustained. (“Digital Visualization” 292)

Myriad critical works in English studies suggest “mapping” metaphorically, including “Thomas De Quincey and Spatial Disorientation” by Roger Porter, which purports to “look at De Quincey’s ‘map’ of London” (217), but, like the works of other theorists who look to “map” or attempt to understand the “mapping” of literary spaces, the mapping becomes metaphorical. This metaphor typically has been used to suggest the importance of geography in the critical work (Roy, Clemm, Staines, Thomsen, Howe), or to suggest an abstract organisational structure, such as a “topography of enigma” with regard to the riddles of the Alice books (Cook 160) or to create a “map of time” (Ach-Sah 2). Maps are also metaphors for identity (France and St Clair, Evans, Diprose and Ferrel, Russel) and other critics analyze the maps themselves, but do not use them to examine a geography of literature (Peters, Gordon and Klein, Roy). Thus it seems Moretti’s question largely remains unanswered. In this paper I will address Moretti’s question by using digital maps to visualise Thomas De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. I will map the movements of De Quincey in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* as he travels through both Wales and the England countryside as well as London during the years 1802-1804 to identify the change in De Quincey’s construction of self as he moves from Wales and the English countryside to London. This spatial reading will examine the differences between De Quincey’s identity in Wales and in London and it will explore the types of spatial constructions

¹ Others include Bradbury, Rode, and Thacker.

that become apparent when plotted on a map: the wide expanses of the verdurous Wales he describes correspond with a De Quincey happy and free to roam, but the constructed topography of London creates confinement where he is trapped within a labyrinthal prison with a De Quincey as pariah. De Quincey constructs his London enclosure to be an externalisation of his self as outcast aligned with the lower class for his *Confessions*, which is seen geographically by the map.

Noticing that De Quincey just *happens* to be in Wales or London is not enough to understand the different constructed selves De Quincey creates in the text, or to understand the imaginative topography that De Quincey constructs. The “London” or the “Wales” in the *Confessions* is not an accurate representation of the real-life equivalent, but that is precisely what gives these places their specific meaning for Thomas de Quincey. The idea of an imaginative topography has been theorized by French philosopher Maurice Blanchot, one of the authors who began “the spatial turn,”² which forms the basis for the investigation of constructed spaces that I use to analyze De Quincey’s geographical representation in *Confessions*. Investigating these theories is now enhanced by mapping geospatial detail with digital maps. Blanchot writes in *The Space of Literature* about an “imaginary space” where “things are *transformed* into that which cannot be grasped ... this space is the poet’s space, where no longer is anything present, where in the midst of absence everything speaks” (141). He differentiates between an implied space *in relation to* reality and an absolute space *of* reality; Lefebvre coined the phrase “produced space,” which is a space separate from “nature” or “absolute space,” and is produced by society, or, in literature’s case, the author/reader and is in constant negotiation and iteration. This constructed space is a space of metaphor, of ideology, of *meaning* (see Rogoff 24). It is this “produced,”

² The postmodern “spatial turn” that occurred in human geography and philosophy after the second world war started with Maurice Blanchot’s *The Space of Literature* (1955), built on Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, that posited an “imaginary space” (141); this would be followed by Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* (1958), Foucault’s “Of Other Spaces” (a lecture delivered in 1967, but not published until 1984), and Henri Lefebvre’s important *The Production of Space* (1974). The place of geography in English literature, however, was not investigated until much later, perhaps due to the English translation of *The Production of Space* not appearing until 1991. See Mitchell and Russell for a very useful thoughts on the spatial turn.

“imaginary,” or “constructed” space, as compared with the topography or geography of the mapped space that I will examine in Thomas De Quincey’s *Confessions*.

This differentiation of spaces seems quite suitable as a means of analyzing the Romantic writers, where the conscious idea of a highly produced space becomes an important part of their poetry as it represents the urban city, especially in such lines as Blake’s “Marks of weakness, marks of woe” (26) in his poem “London.” Wordsworth³ also depicts an imaginary London as a “a fen / Of stagnant waters” (183). Shelley writes, “Hell is a city much like London – / A populous and a smokey city” (194) and Byron’s *Don Juan* depicts London as “A mighty mass of brick, and smoke, and shipping / Dirty and dusky” (180). The physical London may be the basis for the literary construction of the metropolis, but the London that exists in the Romantic literary tradition as a hellish, industrial, weary city constructs a second London existing in a “poet’s space.”

Thomas De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, modelled after a draft of the *Prelude*,⁴ also constructs an imaginary space for London with a series of dark and diabolic metaphors that produce an “imaginative fiction” of London, which I call his *London imaginis*. The *London imaginis* always relates to the *London res* (the physical London as it exists, or existed for De Quincey). That is, the *London res* is the artefact De Quincey uses as a basis for his imaginary topography. To analyze this imaginary space one must identify the difference between real space and poet’s space. One way to illuminate this is by using a map to visualise the movements of De Quincey in Wales and London and to explicate the language he uses to describe each locale, which will show what London represents to De Quincey, specifically that Soho acts as a conceptual enclosure within the “abyss” (347) of London.

This construction of *London imaginis* also becomes a construction of De Quincey’s narrator, and thus by plotting his whereabouts in London in the text one uncovers new insight into De Quincey’s constructed identity. Porter writes, “it’s important to see that [the Whispering Gallery] is not merely a physical place De Quincey remembers from his childhood, but a

³ Note also Wordsworth’s “inner eye” and his *Prelude*, which externalises nature in an almost perfect example of Blanchot’s poet’s space.

⁴ De Quincey read a draft of what would become known as *The Prelude* in 1810 or 1811, almost 40 years before it was finally published in 1850 (Lindop, *The Opium-Eater* 187).

representation of the mind” (“Thomas De Quincey” 224). De Quincey reads London and writes its topography in the *Confessions* just as De Quincey reads and writes his life. He is inextricably linked to the geography; as he constructs his London he constructs himself. The real advantage gained from mapping the constructed Soho enclosure is that it uncovers the constructed identity of the *Confessions* De Quincey attempts. This attempted identity, however, is “without a clear self” (Porter, “Thomas De Quincey” 219); it is as unexamined by De Quincey as the rest of London outside Soho. By reading the constructed space De Quincey writes, one can read the constructed identity he writes.

De Quincey’s written London follows a pattern of constructing the urban text as noted by Julian Wolfreys in his book *Writing London: The Trace of the Urban Text from Blake to Dickens*, who suggests writing is mapping:

each novelist, while drawing on similar notions, ideologies, topographies, architectural models, works with an effort to map London in a manner which unfolds ... which are as much a part of London’s constructedness, the structuration of its structures, as are squares, streets, parks, offices, houses, names. (11)

According to Wolfreys there is always an “imagined London” that is in constant reconstruction; this construction of London soon becomes a parody for writers, not describing London but describing representations of various Londons found in various texts; any writer writing London is not only writing London, but writing the innumerable iterations and copies of Londons found in literature. Wolfreys’ contention is that London is written as a hyperreality (4) and, as such, becomes merely a mirror of the real London and “a reality beyond the experience of the empirical and quotidian” (4). It is exactly De Quincey’s “reality beyond the experience of the empirical” (the *London imaginis*) that I will uncover in the *Confessions* by examining the language De Quincey uses to describe his imagined London and then laying De Quincey’s constructed topography over the empirical map. That is, by containing both an abstracted representation of the world and the places where De Quincey occupies at one time or another in the text, the map will then serve as both representation of the the real world and also De Quincey’s own individual constructed London/Wales. This process will allow one to see the construction of the “imagined London” by showing it against the background of one that is

empirically measured and plotted.

While most critics contend that De Quincey's first edition (1821) is far superior to his second (1856), I have nevertheless used Masson's edition of De Quincey's revised text,⁵ because it includes names previously omitted in the earlier edition, as well as more biographical and geographical detail including enough information to place, for example, Brown's house in Greek Street (Soho) with confidence. Additionally, David Masson's third volume of De Quincey's *Works* is organized geographically: "those Autobiographic papers of De Quincey which contain what may be called more especially his 'London Reminiscences' are brought into connexion, for the first time, with his famous 'Confessions of an English Opium-Eater'." The connexion is close, chronologically and *otherwise*" (1; italics mine). By pairing *Confessions* with a miscellany of remembrances that Masson calls "London Reminiscences" instead of in the *Collected Writings* (Volume XIII),⁶ he has set a precedent for grouping these writings geographically or spatially; the space of "London" is especially important in understanding De Quincey's text.

Plotting De Quincey's movement through London on a map explains De Quincey's London spatially as it describes the limits and shape of his London experience. It shows how De Quincey represented his travels through London's space in the *Confessions* in a way the text proper simply cannot; this will allow for a new way to analyze the structures of the *Confessions*, which will, contrary to Wolfreys' belief, use a map's "potential for new research methodologies that amplify cognition" (Jessop, "Digital" 281) to gain new insight into De Quincey's

⁵ I have used the Masson edition, which was the standard scholarly edition for many years after its publication in 1889. Masson recognizes the topographical importance of London in the *Confessions* by grouping the text with miscellaneous writings about London. Many modern editions use the 1821 text, because, as Alethea Hayter writes, "De Quincey undoubtedly spoiled his masterpiece by revising it" (22). Both Faflack's modern edition and Hayter's Penguin edition use the 1821 text with appendices including some passages of the revised addition. The Chattering and Pickering edition may be considered the definitive modern edition and includes both the 1821 and 1856 versions of the text, though it was unavailable to me when I wrote this paper.

⁶ In fact, the *Suspiria de Profundis* is found in Volume XIII of Masson's *Collected Writings of De Quincey* and is considered by De Quincey to be a sequel to the *Confessions*, so excepting the geographical theme, it would follow that the more logical choice would have been to include this work in the same volume as *The Confessions*.

Confessions.

Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* is an especially good candidate for this sort of visualisation technique because of his knowledge of geography and his awareness of its importance. As a young boy, he played geography games with his brother, creating a fictional land called Gombroon (Lindop, *The Opium-Eater* 18-19) and he later wondered if London's confusing "*terrae incognitæ*" had ever even been mapped (393). Arthur Ricket, for example, notes De Quincey's strong connexion to geography in that "the first important event in De Quincey's life was the roaming life on the hillside of North Wales; the second, the wanderings in 'stoney-hearted Oxford Street'" (9). Both of these events involve De Quincey constructing a highly connotive space based on the geography he occupies. He additionally contrasts these constructed spaces with the former as natural and the latter as artificial:

during my first mournful abode in London, my consolation was (if such it could be thought) to gaze from Oxford Street up every avenue in succession which pierces northwards through the heart of Marylebone to the fields and the woods; for *that*, said I, travelling with my eyes up the long vistas which lay part in light and part in shade—"that is the road to the north, and therefore to Grasmere, ... and if I had the wings of a dove, *that* way I would fly for rest. (376)

Oxford Street, the "stoney-hearted step-mother" (375), "step-mother" indicating a lack of direct bloodline and suggesting a stereotypical uncaring dominant figure, is contrasted to the comfort of the landscape beyond the city, reminiscent of the Wales chapters.

Oxford Street then has a constructed meaning, but it is also a part of the *London res* that plays an exceptionally important role in De Quincey's life; it shapes his identity not only as a human being, but as a writer as well. He uses conditions from London to construct his own London, his *London imaginis*, which is used to construct his *Confessions* identities: the Wales (country) De Quincey and the London (urban) De Quincey. He also constructs what I call a "pariah space" in Soho, London, as seen by plotting De Quincey's movements on the map. Lastly, this constructed identity in a constructed place allows De Quincey to map his own inner

self: “sole, dark, infinite” (346) onto the London of the *Confessions* when he makes his “farewell adieus to summer” (346) and effectively enters the coldness of the infinite London:

All through the day, Wales and her grand mountain ranges ... had divided my thoughts with London. But now rose London—sole, dark, infinite—brooding over the whole capacities of my heart. ... More than ever I stood upon the brink of a precipice; and the local circumstances around me deepened and intensified these reflections, impressed upon them solemnity and terror, sometimes even horror. ... in this Shrewsbury hotel ... An altitude of nineteen or twenty feet showed itself unavoidably upon an exaggerated scale in some of the smaller side-rooms. (346-7)

The imagery De Quincey uses suggests this precipice figuratively becomes London, and the exaggerated scale of the room, the infinite London, is a projection of the hollowness of De Quincey, causing the urban to be more sublime, more full of “echoing hollowness” (347), than even the Wales mountain ranges. De Quincey’s constricted enclosure within the infinite London is an attempt to manage this vastness, and by doing so, create a sort of prison to contain his pariah identity (from what was before “echoing hollowness”). This urban identity is different from his past summery Wales identity, which projected wide expanses and freedom onto the constructed Wales in *Confessions*.

The first thing one must do when mapping a text of literature and plotting the movements of the character(s) to be analyzed involves gathering the textdata (the words that indicate geospatial references, such as a specific street, structure, or area) and then placing points on a map. I have used Richard Horwood’s *Plan of the Cities of London and Westminster, the Borough of Southwark, and Parts Adjoining, Shewing Every House* as it is the most detailed contemporary map of London during that period (1792-9). As Jessop notes, this mapping process takes up “the lion’s share of the time” (“Visualisation” 342). Figure One represents the places De Quincey mentions visiting during his time in Wales (De Quincey, *Confessions* 320-336), directly before coming to London. See figure 1 in Appendix A.

By examining the map of De Quincey’s travels through Wales, one notices that there is a difference between De Quincey’s construction of self in Wales and in London. This differentiation in character can be understood by the differing geospatial locations as represented

on a map. In the breadth of distance De Quincey travelled in Wales (leaving from Chester) one can visualise a rambling journey, reminding one of a picaresque character, covering some 70-100 miles a week (329) and re-entering England at Oswestry (339) very near Chester; in London De Quincey seems almost trapped within a small container, confined to one small area of the vast city, which will be discussed further below. These geospatial coordinates supply a visualisation of the space De Quincey occupies, which is described with very different language than his London chapters. He writes of the English/Welsh countryside on his journey before getting to London: “everything was elegant, polished, quiet, throughout the lawns and groves of this verdant retreat: no rudeness was allowed here; even the little brooks were trained to ‘behave themselves’” (321). The adverbs De Quincey uses—elegant, polished, quiet, verdant—and the description of greenery is in contradistinction to his descriptions of London. The well-behaved brooks in Wales contrast to London’s “dreadful mouth of Acheron” (347), a reference both to Hades and a specific river there, and perhaps as well to the well-documented scatological nature of the Thames river. De Quincey talks about the “gorgeous wood scenery of Montgomeryshire” (328), which opposes the barren London, as Oxford street is a stoney-hearted step-mother. De Quincey describes himself differently too as he “renewed [his] literary friendship[s]” (334) in Wales and “once ... in the small lake of Talyllyn ... [he] was entertained for upwards of three days by a family of young people, with an affectionate and fraternal kindness” (336). The space of London is different for De Quincey, where he is the “pariah” in his “empty house” (355) living in an abyss (a negative, empty space, void of life) and where he describes himself as a “solitary roamer in the streets of London” (*Autobiography* 10). The spaces constructed by De Quincey through his language are corroborated by their representations on the map, and these geometric constructions also suggest two unique constructions of identity as a product of their respective spaces.

De Quincey’s ramblings through Wales have often been overlooked in favour of his lengthier and more interesting treatment of his time in London, but are nevertheless extremely important in reading De Quincey’s *Confessions* spatially. De Quincey’s need to travel must have stemmed from his feeling like “a captive” in a “house of bondage” crying “*let there be freedom*” (279) in his escape from Manchester, citing a “transfiguring of [his] whole

being” (278) and wanting to “abscond” from intense “bodily suffering and mental disappointments” (278) during his unhappy time in grammar school, although he would unfortunately return to unhappiness when he lived in London. De Quincey instead looks toward the “sweet pastoral hills ... the everlasting mountains, that to [his] feelings blew from the garden of Paradise” (279), just as he looks toward Marylebone in London. This need to ramble will seem paradoxical once he gets to London where he is spatially contained to a very small area of the city, but initially De Quincey envisions a “pastoral life” (283) in the Lake District. De Quincey’s description of the Lake district with its “emerald fields ... sublime cluster of mountain groups, and the little network of quiet dells lurking about its head all the way back to Grasmere ... sunny splendor” (282) and his evocation of the landscape painters (282-3), similar to his description of the priory garden (311) and his assertion that Gressford is an “Arcadian vale” (321), mark the land as picturesque and thus highly idealised. This constructed Wales could be therefore categorized as pastoral, in that it is “a sort of artifice, a pretense in which one willingly believes and which one successfully enjoys” (Ettin 134). De Quincey constructs an idyllic Lake District⁷ in connexion with Wales, which he notes is “endless successions of changing beauty ... a pretty rustic home ... having all the luxuries of a fine hotel” (329), and does so in order to construct a country/city dichotomy that is common in English literature, with the country aligned with peacefulness and idylls and the city aligned with crime and dystopia. The country, while pastoral, is open for his travelling as he covers many miles. The city, on the other hand, is constructed as vast and infinite even though De Quincey stays only in a small part of it. The pastoral/urban dichotomy for De Quincey is visualisable on a map, which will show his different constructions of self. One such self “cannot imagine” a “happier life ... than this vagrancy” (329) in the country. The other self becomes a pariah and, like a “wandering Jew liberated,” he will inevitably sacrifice his “breezy freedom” for a “killing captivity” (329) in the city. Alan Blewett notes that “how a ‘breezy freedom’ can be turned into a ‘killing captivity’ is not yet clear,” but he understands that “the language of the pariah is not far distant from this apparently stable system of geographic dichotomies” (156). The freedom of the open spaces and

⁷ No doubt this is in part because of his later years at Dove Cottage and his friendship with Wordsworth before writing the *Confessions*.

“eternal motion” (329) that De Quincey craves in his escape from Manchester is too much, and is replaced by his self-confinement, a “killing captivity” that will change metaphors of the “verdant” Wales and replace them with the empty, lifeless, “stoney” Soho, London. The wide-ranging travels in Wales along with the language used to describe it is seen on the map as natural, open. The map of London, however, shows that De Quincey is trapped in an artificial (i.e. urban) area.

De Quincey describes this loss of freedom as a sort of metamorphosis during the coach-ride from pastoral Wales to urban London, “like one of the twelve Cæsers when dying, saying *Ut puto, Deus fio* (it’s my private opinion that at this very moment I am turning into a god)” (345) and he sees his entry into London as his own “*apotheosis*” (345).⁸ There is a death of the “Wales” De Quincey as he moves into London, and the deification (apotheosis) represents this shift, an almost resurrection into the cave of London, where his self-characterization changes from a social traveller to lonely pariah in the metropolis of London.

De Quincey’s retrospection of London purposefully contrasts his time there as a vagrant experiencing loss, poverty, and later drug abuse, with his uneventful and thus idyllic time in Wales. The safe country De Quincey could peacefully live in had been replaced with the London streets, which Heather Shore notes, “in the early decades of the nineteenth century ... were at the heart of discussions about crime and poverty in the metropolis” (151). The street as site of crime marks London as a different space than the country, at least as perceived by De Quincey, who slept “in common with the rats, rent free” (358) in Brown’s mansion and yet made no mention of snakes in the grass in Wales; in fact, De Quincey makes no mention of anything remotely dangerous in Wales and relates “there are ... no jaguars in Wales—nor pumas—nor anacondas—nor (generally speaking) any Thugs” (330). His description of London, however, coincides with “contemporary analysis of criminal networks, whether envisaged as real or imaginary, [which] tended to concentrate on a model of an ‘underworld,’ a cultural phenomenon with its own driving force, its own momentum” (Shore 154). De Quincey’s language marks the change of spatial setting, from metaphors evoking cool Eden (the English gardens) to one that summons an image

⁸ This may also be connected to the druggist who “evanesced” (380) and recalls the metaphor of being “high” for drug use.

of a fiery Greek Hades (Acheron). It seems De Quincey has gone from his own personal “garden of Paradise” (279) to his own personal Inferno (Acheron, “the inside of a wolf’s throat,” [347] abyss, “furnaces of London” [413]); or, perhaps it is more fitting to say that when De Quincey entered London, it was Paradise Lost.⁹

De Quincey’s vision of the self also changes when he gets to London. The wanderer with *pié poudré* becomes the peripatetic vagrant (360). De Quincey’s move from Wales to London signifies the difference between wandering along a path from town to town and simply wandering around along the streets and in the markets of the London labyrinth. While De Quincey calls London an entire “world” (363) and refers to it as infinite, he, at least in his own narrative, stays within a small self-imposed boundary as is evident in the map of his wanderings. His paradisaal countryside is gone, replaced by the hellish London city, as Miller writes: “astronomical space, the wilderness of ocean, a pathless desert, the gloomy and centerless maze of London—the place of lonely exile from Paradise can take all these forms” (25). As an exile, he becomes not only a vagabond, but also a “pariah,” (359-60; Beer 80; Miller 72). Just as he describes Ann as “pariah,” along with the girl from Brown’s house and other “Street-walkers” (360), he aligns himself with them by “wandering about town and country as if he had nothing in common with the rest of mankind [sic]. His vagabondage is shown best in his purely imaginative work, and in the autobiographical sketches” (Rickett 46). This De Quincey is a

prototype of what [he] will call in the *Suspiria de Profundis* ‘the Dark Interpreter,’ who is, he says, ‘originally a mere reflex of [his] inner nature’; ... but sometimes, as his face alters, his works alter ... This figure is best described as the archetypal self which one constructs in dreams and visions, whose life mirrors that of the suffering individual but preserves an autonomy as well in a grander sphere of design. (De Luca 7)

This is the *London imaginis* De Quincey, the Dark Interpreter figure he constructs as “pariah” who exists outside the *milieu* of society and exists solely in London. The construction of self is dependent on the construction of topography, however, and so the plotting of De Quincey’s London wanderings 1802–1804 in the *Confessions* becomes important in interpreting this space. See figure 2 in Appendix A.

⁹ Miller suggests it is from the opium usage that De Quincey’s gains his “keys of Paradise” (49).

This pariah De Quincey is the constructed identity that De Quincey produces in the London chapters of *Confessions*. De Quincey “sleep[s] in the streets or under bridges with the countless other outcasts of London” (Lindop, *The Opium-Eater* 85) and “naturally fell in more frequently with those female peripatetics who are technically called street-walkers” (360). De Quincey thus constructs a London pariah-self, who would shadow him via his opium dreams, described at the end of his *Confessions*, for the rest of his life. De Quincey’s descriptions of London as “sole, dark, infinite,” abyss, “mighty world” (363), “labyrinth” (375), and “sea” (338) construct his *London imaginis* in the *Confessions* and contrast his picturesque descriptions of the country in Wales and the Lake District. These distinct constructions of space will result in distinct constructions of selves: one in the country and one in the city. As far as one can tell from his reconstruction of his movements in London, De Quincey remains in a relatively small space that comprises approximately the area of Soho, which again contrasts not only to his long rambling journey through Wales, but also to the very words he uses to describe London, all implying vastness. The metaphor of the labyrinthal maze suggests a large structure of confusing corridors, which is a common description of London (and is certainly evident on the map), but for De Quincey this labyrinth has him “lost,” meaning both fallen in his pariah space where he remains circulating, and as unable to find the exit. Thus, while De Quincey considers London infinite, there is but a small enclosure where De Quincey stays, signifying one of two things: either De Quincey really did only stay in Soho, or, and I think this more likely, to construct his own personal pariah space he mentioned only the area of London where he was with other pariahs: Ann of Oxford Street, the streetwalkers, and the girl from Mr. Brown’s house.

Firstly, assuming De Quincey did really stay in Soho, there exists an enclosure with peripatetic streetwalkers and other pariahs living within the boundaries, which extend just beyond the area of Soho,¹⁰ just west of St. Giles and Covent Garden. De Quincey’s London pages are not written pastorally like the Wales chapters, however; London is instead described using metaphors evoking terror and horror, generally because of an implied limitless or vastness. This dystopic conceptual enclosure is made visible only by the map; it is an area in which De

¹⁰ Soho then had different boundaries, “occupied by numerous streets in the neighbourhood of Leicesterfields, up to Oxford-street, and abutting on Golden-square on the western side” (Allen 308) and found within St. Anne’s parish, north of modern Shaftesbury Avenue (Sheppard 26).

Quincey confines himself in order to be aligned with a set of outcasts in London.

Because of De Quincey's constant motion, however, it seems strange that he would confine himself to such a small space especially when we recall his earlier lament "let there be freedom." De Quincey could go anywhere in London; he easily could have left the area just around Soho, but, according to his *Confessions*, he never did, even after returning to London in 1804 when he no longer resided at Brown's house and had lost contact with Ann; it seems he intended to remain in his Soho enclosure, creating, as Joetta Harty suggests, an imagined community of pariahs (6).

The identity of De Quincey shifts as he enters this imagined community, from a wandering upper-middle-class teenager in Wales to an outcast in a personal London hell who "should not have absolutely disdained the humble station of 'devil'" (364). This shift in identity can be viewed geospatially. De Quincey was very class conscious, was born into a wealthy family, was a great Greek scholar, was a successful English writer,¹¹ and always considered himself among the elite in society. Mapping De Quincey reveals something about this class consciousness: it shows where he claims he was and, more importantly, it shows where he was not. John Barrell, in his *The Infection of Thomas De Quincey* writes, "De Quincey's own fear of the working class is ... very evident" (3) after examining some letters and articles De Quincey wrote in the 1840s, where he claims to have kept the "'working poor' under surveillance" (3); in fact the map of De Quincey's London in his *Confessions* shows he does not appear in the less wealthy areas to the East of Soho. Jerry White calls the areas of Bishopsgate, Houndsditch, Leadenhall and Aldgate the "London Ghetto" (152) and notes that Covent Garden just next to Soho is "*the* London bohemia" (246) while Fleet Street was called "the Street of Drink" (246) in the early nineteenth century. Instead of these lowly areas, De Quincey remains in Soho in his "conspicuous" (358) mansion at night and he wanders around an historically wealthier area of London and also an historically safer one during the day (Shore 153). Covent Garden is especially known for its high prostitution rate at the time, as were Southward, Westminster, Saffron Hill and St. Giles (White 298-99). Reading De Quincey on the map helps understand the

¹¹ The *Confessions* "successfully [made] the transition from critical to popular success" in 1823 (Lindop, *The Opium-Eater* 260).

working class anxiety he held during the beginning of the nineteenth century. De Quincey is beside the less wealthy, but never truly among them. Barrell writes, “the pleasure is not at all to pretend to be one of the working and inferior class; it is to pretend to be like them, fundamentally the same, but different in all that really concerns one’s sense of identity and self-esteem” (2). This identity is his constructed “Dark Interpreter.” It is a pariah he has constructed to legitimate his story as a vagrant in the streets of London. Mapping De Quincey as spatially located in Soho augments this reading: while he visits the markets and the Opera House with the poor, he never really considers himself one of them though he is, in effect, penniless. The “De” in “De Quincey” is in fact fabricated; long after his mother reverted to simply “Quincey” (Lindop, *The Opium-Eater* 59), Thomas kept the article in his surname in order to keep a certain posture of eliteness: though his father was an English merchant, Thomas considered himself above the working class and this can be seen by visualising the area in which he stays on a map.

Horwood’s map shows the discrete parishes of London and the contiguity of these areas shows the proximity of the poor and the middle- or upper-class in what Wolfreys calls a “resolutely heterogeneous” London (18): De Quincey in Soho is right beside the poor in St. Giles. Mapping De Quincey in Soho shows *The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* as a class conscious text, both morally and economically; without the visual aid of the map De Quincey’s class consciousness is difficult to notice in this work.

However, even though De Quincey never mentions in his *Confessions* leaving the Soho enclosure during the years 1802–04, he does stay in 4 York Street (near Covent Garden) while writing the book in 1821 (Lindop “Thomas De Quincey” n.p.). He does not mention this in the text of the *Confessions*, however; he merely speaks of walking down Oxford Street again, the site of his past misfortune. Conceivably De Quincey does in fact leave Soho during the years 1802–04, but simply omits it from the text. He is, after all, an unreliable narrator who describes London in a biased way by mentioning only the hellishness of the city, referring to it the “mighty furnaces of London life” and remembering his house on Greek Street with its “darkness, cold, silence, and desolation” (350). De Quincey also admits to omissions and, presumably, alterations of his text, when he writes in a letter published in *London Magazine*, “to tell nothing *but* the truth must, in all case, be an unconditional moral law; to tell the *whole* truth not equally so” (Japp

181). It appears De Quincey is purposely creating his *London imaginis* as a place of his misfortune by writing an alternate London from the *London res* he knew. One final map, including known places De Quincey visited outside of the Soho enclosure from other textual sources, will help to reveal a potential infelicity in De Quincey's claim. See figure 3 in Appendix A.

The topographical scheme of his wanderings makes De Quincey's assertion that he stayed in Soho less tenable. There is relatively little information available concerning De Quincey's life in London during 1802–04 besides the *Confessions*; he does, however, mention going several places outside of Soho in London in his letters. He visits Coleridge in 1808 (and quite possibly earlier) in his lodgings at the *Courier* on the Strand (Japp 104), and Charles Lamb at Temple in 1804 (Japp 108). He also mentions walking in Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens, and lives in Great Titchfield Street (Japp 105), Northumberland Street (Japp 105) and Charles's Knight's house in Pall Mall (Japp 189), and is even discovered by Mr. Knight at the "Waterloo bridge" (Japp 190). It appears that De Quincey just as likely left Soho as did not and "presumably he sat in his rooms or *wandered about* the town" (Lindop, *The Opium-Eater* 83; italics mine); implicitly, Lindop suggests that De Quincey likely spent much time outside the boundaries of Soho. Miller notices in De Quincey's *Autobiography* that De Quincey sees "'transient glimpses' of side streets ... stretching far off into a 'murky atmosphere' of 'gloom and uncertainty' [that] give De Quincey an increasing sense of the 'vastness and illimitable proportions' of the city" (24), and De Quincey's "sea of London" could hardly be composed of only the people of Soho, especially concerning the breadth of his travels in the city not mentioned in the *Confessions* as seen by visualising them on a map.

If De Quincey did in fact leave Soho, as it appears he likely did, the reader is now forced to ask, why would he construct this enclosure in the text? It is very tempting to explain it by citing De Quincey's "pariah nature" (Miller 62). Lindop explains De Quincey's plight by suggesting

his reckless venture into London ... may well have grown from a childhood response to his mother's habit of supervising every aspect of his life and presuming guilt in every doubtful case. Feeling too much observed and judged, he may have experienced

freedom only in concealment, so that he now needed to disappear completely from the knowledge of the family to assert his independence. (*The Opium-Eater* 81)

De Quincey's "pariah nature" is manifested in his erratic and masochistic behaviour: he runs from the safe confines of school or home to live life wandering Wales or lost in London with no money, few friends, and no prospects and, eventually, he also abuses opium and never bothers to graduate from Oxford (Lindop, *The Opium-Eater* 160). As E.S. Burt suggests, "the *Confessions* show De Quincey deprived or depriving himself of the familiar" (96) and Rickett suggests that De Quincey, a born wanderer, displays the three tendencies of a vagabond, one of which is "a constitutional reserve whereby the Vagabond, though rejoicing in the company of a few kindred souls, is put out of touch with the majority of men and women. This is a temperamental idiosyncrasy, and must not be confounded with misanthropy" (8). The "few kindred souls" in De Quincey's life include Ann of Oxford Street, the girl from Brown's mansion, and even the lady from the painting in Manchester from the *Confessions*, as well as Elizabeth from *Suspiria de Profundis* and the real Catherine Wordsworth. Rickett suggests that otherwise De Quincey is "wandering about town and country as if he had nothing in common with the rest of mankind. His vagabondage is shown best in his purely imaginative work, and in the autobiographical sketches" (Rickett 46). Though some see this vagabondage as extremely individualistic (De Luca 20-21), Harty suggests that there exists a community of pariahs, bound together by some common folly and, as seen on the map, by geographic location. For Ann, it is her descent into prostitution; for De Quincey, it is a descent into destitution. This community of pariahs, the streetwalkers that De Quincey sympathises with in the *Confessions*, seems to be constructed entirely within Soho; this is the space where both Ann of Oxford Street and the illegitimate Brown girl exist, both of whom De Quincey would not see again after breaking free of his incarceration from his Soho "prison," as De Luca (20) refers to it. This seems to be a construction not only of identity, but also of spatial dimension: a "pariah space," or community of pariahs, including both Ann and De Quincey himself.

This Soho enclosure is a type of self-containment or imprisonment; it is a self-inflicted pariah space. It is almost as though De Quincey, like an ascetic, is atoning for his opiate usage, poverty, fraternity with prostitutes, and vagrancy, and so writes of himself as confined to walk

Soho, the site of his unsavoury London life. In *Suspiria de Profundis*, De Quincey refers to pariah worlds, which one may see as a suitable way to describe De Quincey's London; as De Luca writes, "the immersion in a welter of harsh experience, later termed the 'Pariah Worlds,' [is] expressed characteristically in imagery of labyrinthine cities, barren deserts, and chaotic voids" (5). De Quincey refers to London as labyrinthine and complains of being lost and confused among the streets: "I came suddenly upon such a knotty problems of alleys, alleys without soundings, such enigmatical entries, and such sphinx's riddles of streets without obvious outlets or thoroughfares, as must baffle the audacity of porters and confound the intellects of hackney coachmen" (393). The difficulty of navigating late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century London is well-documented, but certainly this is not reason enough for De Quincey to remain in Soho, especially for such a long stretch of time. This leads to two conclusions. Firstly, De Quincey is constructing a "pariah space," which De Luca reads as a moral allegory with De Quincey "missing real human love [and] resort[ing] to a deceptive haven that eventually becomes his prison" (20-21). The use of the word "prison" connotes a lack of agency in De Quincey's confinement, but I contend that De Quincey is willfully constructing this enclosure in order to align himself with the outcasts. Secondly, De Quincey uses rhetorical language to construct a *London imaginis* that is, as Porter suggests, without a clear self.

By analyzing the pariah space, one can see that De Quincey is not actually constructing himself above the poor, as Barrell asserts, but in some ways he *is* keeping himself among them. Perhaps he wishes to create a liminal space that appeals to both gentlemen (he is in a mansion in Soho) and the middle class readers. He writes in the introduction to his *Autobiography* that

in aristocratic classes, having more leisure and wealth [than the 'neutral class'], the intercourse is inconceivably more rapid; so that the publication of any book which interests them is secured at once; and this publishing influence passes downwards; but rare, indeed, is the inverse process of publication through an influence spreading upwards. (7)

He admits to writing a "neutral class" text, but wants it to appeal to an "upper class" audience as well, if for no other reason than to make some money. Perhaps this is why he may be concealing such activities as visiting Lamb, which would alienate the "neutral class" reader by lifting his

“pariah” veil or shattering the down-and-out illusion. On the other hand, it could also offend the upper class Victorian Readers by focusing on an opium-addled, vagrant, friend of the prostitutes who considered himself a gentleman.

Reading the text as a class conflict spatially one sees a liminal or contradictory or even undecided formation. The map informs the reader that De Quincey is in Soho, an area away from which aristocrats had been moving by the mid-eighteenth century. Swallow Street, which De Quincey mentions in the text, is a divide “between aristocratic London in the west and plebeian London in the east. And if Swallow Street went, then so would its ‘filthy labyrinthine environs’ and ‘dirty courts’ filled with the poor” (White 24). This would cause Soho to become a place where “tailors and goldsmiths and carriage-builders brushed coat-skirts with gentlemen of private means” (White 16). Soho then became neglected with little development or upkeep unlike some of its neighbouring areas, and by the mid-nineteenth century most respectable families had moved away and prostitution, gambling, and poorer immigrants (White 139) had replaced them. Roy Porter suggests “once-fashionable residential quarters like Soho ... had ceased to be acceptable addresses” (236) by the mid-to-late Victorian period. Thus the area in 1802 would be one in transformation from dignified to desultory. It would still have an historic elegance, but a contemporary tarnish.

This deterioration of course, goes beyond simply constructing the pariah space and extends to De Quincey’s identity itself. De Quincey’s Dark Interpreter is as artificial as the bounds of Soho that De Quincey constructs in the *Confessions*. De Quincey’s identity is at once constructed from the geospatial boundaries, from the “reflex of [his] inner nature” (Luca 6) that takes on the shadowy “fierce action of misery” (413) and the “harsh, cruel, repulsive” (360) attributes of the metropolis and it is at the same time the source of De Quincey’s *London imaginis*. De Luca notes that “throughout the work there is a pervasive tendency to externalise, often reductively, the data of inward experience” (2); De Quincey projects his emotions on to the space he occupies. This externalisation is seen on the map, along with the constructed pariah space.

De Quincey revisits one such externalisation, the Greek Street mansion, when writing his *Confessions* in 1821 and notices that “the windows are no longer coated by a paste composed of

ancient soot and superannuated rain; and the whole exterior no longer wears an aspect of gloom” (358). This renovation is a metaphor for De Quincey’s liberation from his constructed pariah space.¹² The soot and superannuated rain is not only from the dirty city and years of thundershowers, but is also metaphorically the projection of De Quincey’s 1802–1804 inner pariah self, which for years had gathered grime and soot on his identity and from which the later De Quincey (as a writer of the text) will have finally emancipated himself. When revisiting the mansion, he also

observe[s] a domestic party, assembled, perhaps, at tea, and apparently cheerful and gay —marvellous contrast, in my eyes, to the darkness, cold, silence, and desolation of that same house nineteen years ago, when its nightly occupants were one famishing scholar and a poor, neglected child. (359)

This is an externalisation of experiences that in 1802 were dark and dreary and remained so for many years, but by 1821 had become “cheerful and gay.” He would later describe an externalisation of self in an opium vision with lakes “shining like mirrors” (441) as they became oceans, reflecting De Quincey’s outer self literally, but his inner self metaphorically as his “mind tossed ... upon the billowy ocean” (441). Miller (27) and Wolfreys (103) also notice a tendency for De Quincey to project his experience onto the London he inhabits in *Confessions*. His construction of Soho, his *London imaginis*, is in consonance with his construction of self, his *Ego imaginis*; both are spatial constructions made visible through the map.

De Quincey’s metaphors of the city also match his prose style and the way he describes himself. For example De Quincey’s humble station of *devil* could reside not simply in London, but only in the *furnaces* of London. Additionally, De Quincey constructs Ann of Oxford Street to symbolise suffering, naivety, and lost innocence, as De Quincey himself must have known them; Grevel Lindop suggests “perhaps he [De Quincey] named her after the parish in which Soho was situated, the Parish of St Anne’s, Westminster, which then possessed an Ann[e] Street, a Little St Ann[e] Street, and a St Ann[e] Court” (*The Opium-Eater* 89). This reading would mark Ann as not only a projection of De Quincey (or, as many critics suggests, as a projection of the

¹² Miller suggests De Quincey’s liberation comes via his opium dreams and “literature of power” (49).

conglomeration of the lost female figures in De Quincey's life, namely his sister and Catherine Wordsworth), but as a projection of Soho. That is, Ann can be visualised on the map as an anthropomorphised Soho, the site of De Quincey's own suffering where he wandered along many of the streets of an underworld called not Acheron, but Ann. The furnaces of London (his Soho) is a geographical projection of De Quincey's past pains in regard to those lost female figures; it is a space he constructs so that he can exist within it as a constructed lowly self, as devil.

This projection is his Dark Interpreter, which not only matches the metaphorically dark London Soho enclosure in which De Quincey wanders, but also empties him of his inner self (identity) in the process of his "apotheosis" when he notes he is in "horror recoiling from that unfathomed abyss in London into which [he] was now so wilfully precipitating [him]self" (347). During this apotheosis De Quincey stumbles into the abyss, metaphorically, and loses his earthly humanity that is so present in the Wales chapters. Grevel Lindop notices that "Thomas Quincey of Greenhay, Manchester" had undergone a "loss of social identity [that] was now virtually complete: not only had he vanished from his guardians to become a shabby stray in a huge city, but his very name and parentage were questioned" (*The Opium-Eater* 85). Thomas De Quincey loses his identity in London because he projects his identitylessness onto the "sea of London" where faces become imperceptible (441) and elide together: what Joetta Harty might see as a community of pariahs becomes nothing more than an individual alone amidst innumerable people. Perhaps this loss of self is representative of the loss De Quincey felt during his life of loss: his loss of his father, of Ann, of Catherine Wordsworth, of the relationship with his mother, and of his sister. De Luca comments on De Quincey's losses and suggests, "he [De Quincey] regrets one kind of loss, the death or disappearance of beloved objects known in a period of innocence, and seeks to replace it by evoking images of another kind of loss, loss of self in an easeful merging with a harmonious cosmos" (8). De Quincey's dichotomisation of self, his loss of identity, is an externalisation of his need to separate from his past, his mother, his Manchester Grammar school, even his idyllic life in Wales, and this loss of identity both comes from and intensifies his London experience: it both validates and horrifies his London times in a cognitive dissonance that De Quincey curiously embraces.

This is perhaps why there is a disconnection between the infinite London and the relatively small area De Quincey says he stays in. He is always in motion (first, rambling through Wales, then, wandering London), but while in London he contains his travels. He is afraid of getting lost, and more than just in the *terræ incognitæ* of London, but in the *ego incognita* of London, the site that both leaves him identityless and amplifies his inner darkness. London is much more “infinite” and large than Wales, and much more frightening to explore, not only because of the danger of the streets, but because of De Quincey’s apotheosis into an outcast in the Soho enclosure, meaning the real *terræ incognitæ* De Quincey is unable to navigate is himself as he tries to reconcile his own past self in the *Confessions*.

Mapping this imaginative geography shows the complex geographical constructions De Quincey is creating in his *Confessions*, which in turn represent the identity that he projects onto the land he occupies. This creates two different constructions: the vast yet navigable Wales and the constricted labyrinthine enclosure in London. It is the complex constructions of identity and London, as well as the projection of self onto London, that are facilitated by the map, which will contrast the Wales De Quincey with the London De Quincey and the *London res* with the *London imaginis*. Studying the maps of Wales and London provide new possibilities for reading and understanding Thomas De Quincey spatially as both a constructed Rambler in Wales and a constructed vagabond in London. He constantly writes his *ego imaginis* in liminality: spatially (in Wales and in the Soho enclosure), economically (near but never among the poor), and socially (a pariah, but only via his “Dark Interpreter”). Using the map to understand the spatial structures De Quincey imprints on the text of *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* allows more advanced reading of De Quincey’s constructions of geography and biography. A topographical analysis of Thomas De Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* yields a unique and insightful reading of the text. The place of geography in literature surely is to help expand our knowledge of literature through the spatial constructions present in the text, answering Moretti’s question with an emphatic “yes! Maps *do* add something, in fact, much, to our knowledge of literature.”

Appendix A

Figure 1. Map of areas visited during “Wales wandering” (*Confessions* 320-336). Google maps.

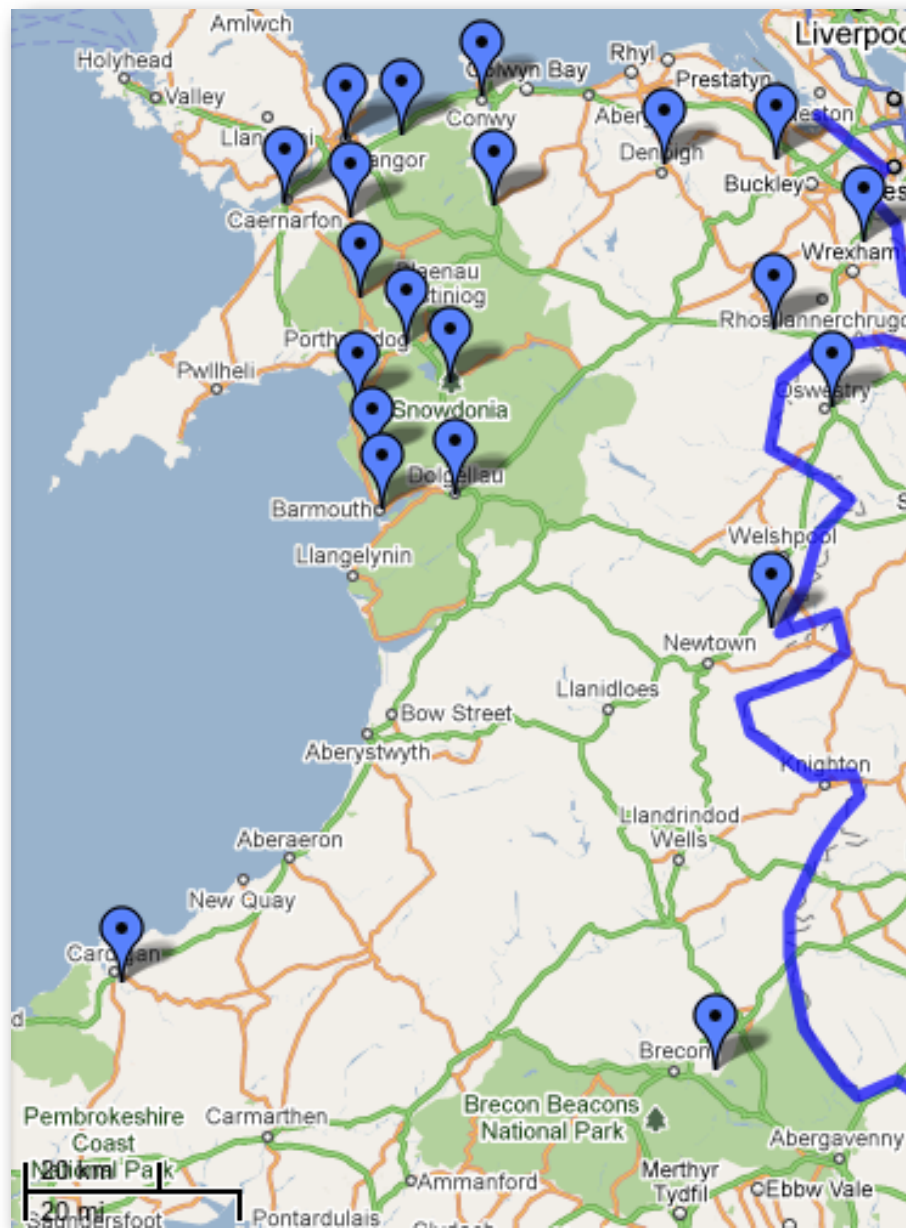


Figure 2. De Quincey's visited locations in Soho; the numbers mark sequentially the mention of locations in the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. Grub Street Project.

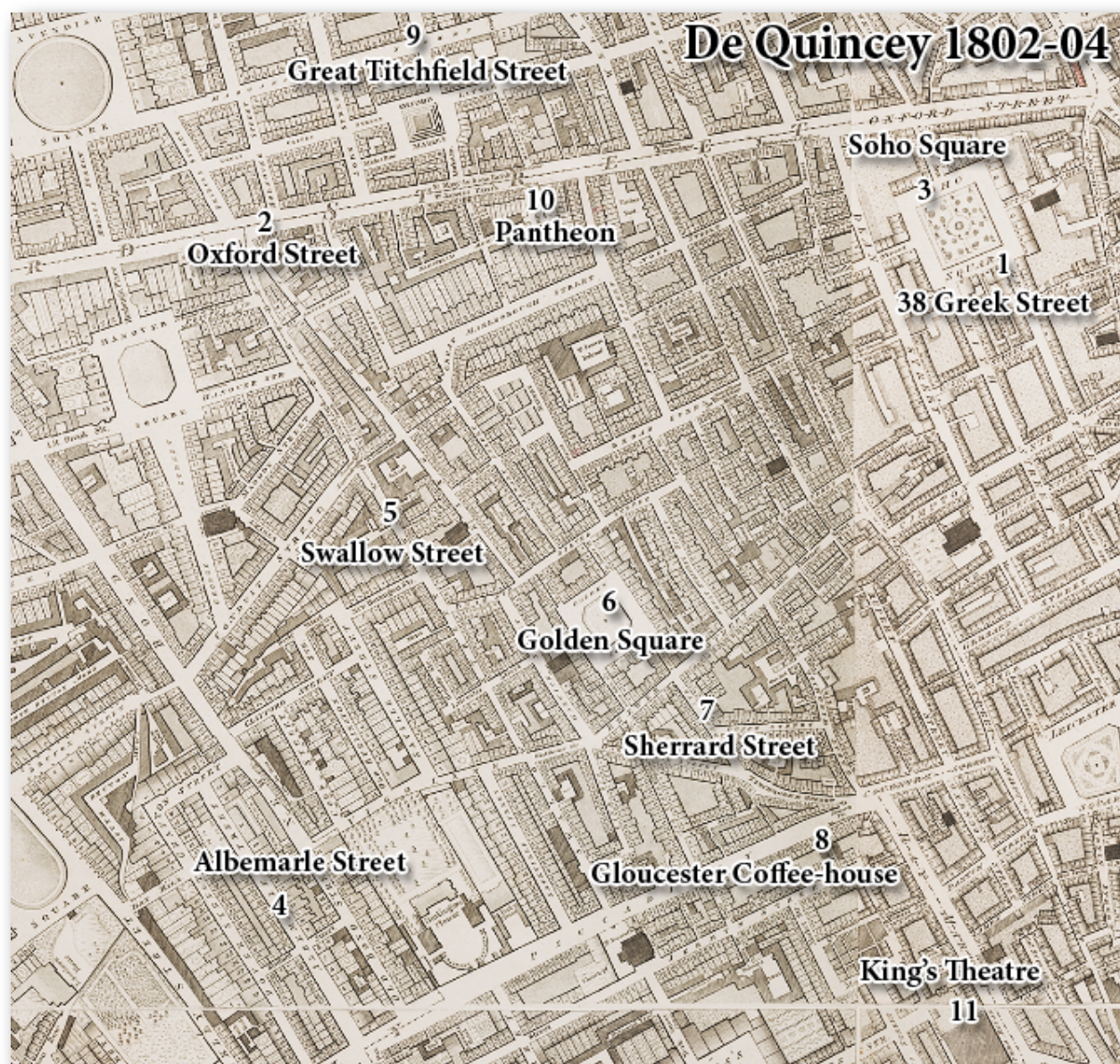
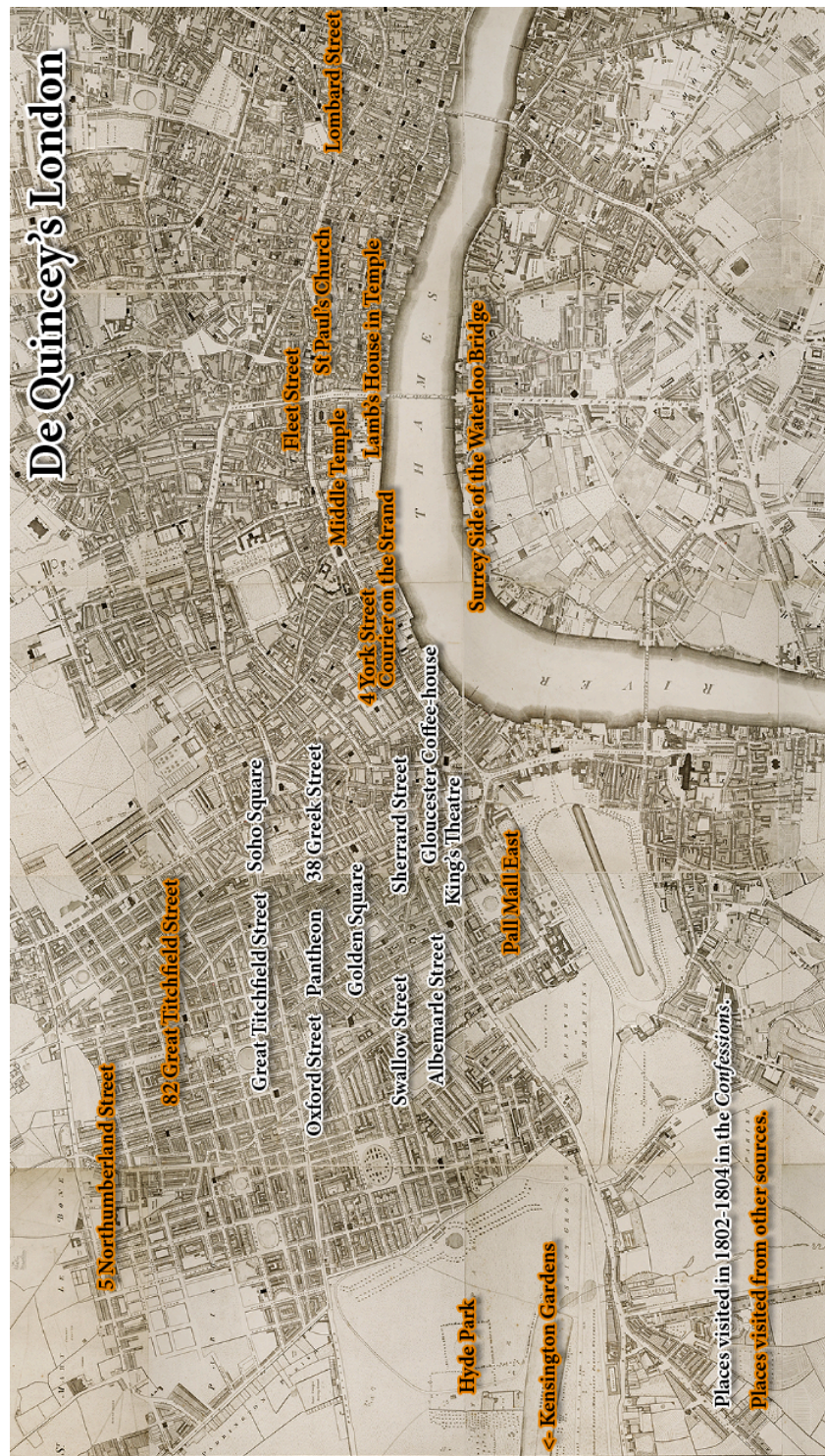


Figure 3. De Quincey's London using additional textual sources and years after 1804. White text indicates locations mentioned in the *Confessions*; orange text indicates locations mentioned by De Quincey in other texts. Ibid.



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